

Chapter 3 Persevere

“Any idea why my clothes don’t count as torso and legs things?” Kate asked her well read traveling companion.

“They probably need to be magical. Did y... you... kill... something?” he asked.

Kate gulped, nodding lightly.

“M... maybe... they had something,” he suggested.

She chuckled to herself and continued walking. “Sure, maybe. Didn’t think about that in my delirious state of blood loss. You kill anything yet?” she asked, more accusing than anything. His blade was still clean.

He shook his head, avoiding eye contact.

“Sorry,” she said after a few more minutes had passed. “A lot... to process.”

“Sure,” he said, his voice quiet.

Kate winced when she slipped on a loose stone, catching herself as her hand automatically went to the bandage on her leg. She cursed in a hissing tone.

“A... are you okay?” Grey asked in a careful tone, leaning away from her a little as he clutched his sword.

Are you fucking blind, she thought, gritting her teeth as she sighed. “Let’s just get to the castle. I need to lie down,” she said in a near hissing whisper, the stress and pain getting to her. *Or we’re going to get killed by even more monsters. Who knows, maybe they even came from the castle.*

The forest opened up a little by now, the slope far less steep than before. Brown leaves rustled in the wind and under their boots, crickets and birds occasionally calling out. “We should be getting close,” Kate whispered, the trees casting longer shadows by the minute. If she wanted one thing out of this day, then it was not spending the night outside. Keeping watch with two people was not something she was looking forward to either way, but to trust a random boy she met in the woods to stay awake was more than just a stretch.

Kate hoped the castle was empty, abandoned, its gates unlocked. They could surely find a cellar where they could hide. She started to question her sense of direction a few hundred meters later when she finally spotted the battlements through the thicket, flowing water audible in the distance. They had made it with the last half hour of sunlight.

She leaned against a nearby tree, giving herself a minute to take a breather. The pain remained constant, her leg throbbing but at least only from her thigh. *Burns are worse*, she thought, the knowledge not doing much in form of consolation. Pain was pain after all.

“Is that it?” Grey asked in a soft tone, keeping his distance from her and trying to stay hidden.

Kate glanced over. “No, we’re looking for the next castle three streets down the road. Their breakfast offers are...,” she said and trailed off, gritting her teeth. *The situation is dire*, she thought. *If I can’t even finish my dry remarks.*

Her companion remained silent, neither confused nor appreciative of her humor.

The situation perhaps demanded a more serious outlook but as far as Kate was concerned, she'd have stand up comedians at her own funeral.

She felt something touch her arm and looked up to find Grey much closer, a concerned look on his face.

"Y... you... c... you didn't respond," he stuttered out.

Kate rubbed her eyes, the edge of her vision a little blurry. "Let's go," she said, carefully taking one step after the other until they reached the tree line about fifteen meters away from the simple castle. She could see a car, parked in front of the high reaching old stone wall. One of the two heavy wooden gate doors was slightly ajar, noises coming from within. "Someth-" she started when a high pitched scream resounded from within.

A *kid*, she thought and ran, her teeth gritted as adrenaline took over, each step sending throbbing pain to her head. She wedged her shoulder between the two gate doors and pushed them open until she could squeeze through, finding herself on a paved stone yard with a small ticket shack on the left, followed by a two story house, and a stone building without any windows. She saw towers and what looked like barracks on the right, a tree at the end of the long yard, the last third not paved. Little sunlight remained but she could see the small forms of goblins running to the largest of three buildings on the left, the only one on that side which seemed truly part of the castle.

Kate didn't think, following the creatures with her crowbar at the ready. She knew the wounds would open but it didn't matter. She heard the people now, shouting and screaming. *Put out the fire. Get them out.*

There were corpses near her, goblins and larger bodies. She reached the entrance, her crowbar slamming into the head of a surprised green monster, its body slapping against the pavement as she already aimed for the second one. It barely managed to lift its tiny dagger when the steel bar came down from above, not quite managing to connect.

Kate locked eyes with the creature, its body unbalanced from the strike as she instinctively kicked forward. An impact resounded but she nearly blacked out, stumbling to the side as a blinding pain shot up from her leg. She cursed, hitting the side of the building before she pushed on, dragging her leg now and using the stone wall to stay upright.

The creature had fallen from her kick, stumbling up when it was swatted down with a heavy two handed strike.

Kate nearly fell on top of the small goblin, balancing before she brought down her weapon one more time, a wet crunch the response before she ripped the steel out of the twitching creature. *Don't stop.*

She found the door and went inside.

Smells of fresh blood, fire too. Wood burning.

A large green man stood before her, holding a blade stuck inside of a human, his satisfied snort the next thing she heard before a high-pitched noise started in her left ear.

Kate forced herself forward, stumbling when she saw the creature glance back, his vicious blade still stuck inside the young man. Blond hair, she noted, and probably dead. *Put out the fire*, she thought and rushed forward, ignoring his quick movement to rip the blade out of the body. She

aimed for the head and swung in a horizontal arc, her crowbar going far as the man ducked, turning in the same motion.

Her arms were high when she brought the weapon back, a cold feeling spreading through her stomach as she locked eyes with the creature. It had tusks, she noted, one of its eyes blinded by a scar from a long past battle. It seemed confident, mocking even.

Kate heard another scream from above, her arms tensing before she brought the crowbar down with all the strength her body could muster.

The creature tried to catch the weapon with his arm, only managing to slow it down slightly.

The bent top of the crowbar sunk into the orc's face, its nose, working eye, and cheekbone pushed to the side in an unnatural way. Kate still heard the high pitched noise in her ears, feeling the orc's grip on her weapon weaken as she ripped it out and brought it down again, knowing that he was doing the same to her with his blade.

The next strike cracked his skull, the fourth one bending his head to the side, his body slackening as he stumbled backwards, hitting the large wood stove with an immediate sizzling sound. He didn't react anymore, slowly sliding down before he came to rest half propped up by the very man he had killed before.

Kate didn't dare look down. Her body was growing weak but something pushed her forward. She couldn't hear anything, her vision limited, focused only on the small open door that led to a spiral staircase.

Put out the fire.

Get them out.

She hit the wall and pushed on, taking each step with renewed vigor. A part of her knew it was over, knew she would die. And yet she refused, anger, fear, and fire mixing in her chest and stomach, a feeling now all that made her stand. One green creature, she struck. Two, she missed, and hit. Her vision grew dark. She stood up again, metal clanging to the floor. Humans. Afraid. Corpses. One last enemy, green, scared. Her weapon struck, a dull thud resounding as she smeared its skull against the wall.

Kate turned, gripping her weapon as she looked for the next monster to kill. Were the humans here monsters? Were they enemies? A part of her considered as another wanted to move, to kill. She fell to her knees, looking down as her weapon clattered to the floor. Blood, there was so much of it. Too much. She should not be alive, a part of her knew. And then her vision went dark, her ears still ringing. *I got them out.*

Kate woke up to darkness, her eyes failing to focus as she felt the pain in her stomach and leg. It was dulled, she noted, her body and mind too tired to even groan. *Painkillers... strong ones*, she thought, her head swimming as she closed her eyes again. Everything felt sore.

"What are we gonna do?" a male voice whispered somewhere nearby.

"We wait out the night, and think about that tomorrow. You should rest, dear," a woman said quietly, her voice sounding tired.

Kate could hear several people breathing, one snoring even. *Am I in the castle? What happened?*

“Peter died... and Chloe, that thing must’ve...,” the man whispered, his voice cracking slightly.

“It’s not your fault. There was nothing you could’ve done,” the woman said.

He paused, shifting his body in the dark. “*She* did something about it. Maybe if I had the same will... and now she will die too.”

Kate gulped.

“She’s still alive. And her fever has lessened in the last few hours. Don’t lose hope, Jon. We’ve been through worse,” the woman said.

He huffed. “No we haven’t.”

“Maybe not,” she said with a chuckle. “But we’ll get through this too, and so will she. Now sleep, the door is locked and I’m right next to you.”

“Two hours,” he said.

“Yes, yes,” the woman answered in a reassuring manner.

Kate smiled to herself. Perhaps it was the medicine, but she felt safe. *I did get them out*, she thought and fell asleep.

Three green tusked men rushed her from all sides, blood covered blades in their hands as they struck her down.

Kate saw the blades bite into her flesh, blood dripping down from the stumps as flames enveloped her surroundings. She could feel the heat and sweat as her skin melted, the monsters around her hacking their vicious swords into her unmoving form.

She woke with a start, breathing fast as she felt her heart beating. A groan escaped her as she felt the wounds, Kate forcing herself to lie still, her breathing slowing down.

“Don’t move too much, or the cuts will open again,” a woman said.

Kate opened her eyes, her sight focusing. She had survived the night, light pouring in through some cracks in the ceiling.

The woman wrung out a piece of cloth above a steel bucket filled with water, walking over before she carefully placed it on Kate’s brow. “You had a pretty bad fever. I cleaned up your wounds but honestly, you should probably be dead,” she said with a smile.

Kate looked at the middle aged woman, her brown hair bound in a simple braid. She wore jeans and a beige jumper, a brown leather jacket on top.

“Not sure if I’ve ever seen someone lose that much blood, let alone wake up again in the morning without a transfusion. But I haven’t seen sword wielding monsters before either, real ones that is. I’m Melusine. Grey told us you’re Kate,” she explained.

“I am,” Kate said in a quiet tone, her throat sore. She received a cup with water before she could even ask.

Melusine smiled and gently touched her shoulder. “You saved us, you know. Thank you. Do you need anything else?”

“Radio... my... my crowbar,” Kate said. “Just... in case.”

“It’s right there,” Melusine said, pointing next to the simple bed. “You seemed quite capable at using it. There were a few radios here too, but there’s nothing on, other than the general warning. I’ll bring you yours later, but Jonathan said it’s best to conserve the batteries. For flashlights or anything else.”

Kate glanced at the crowbar, seeing no more blood on it. She too was dressed in fresh clothes, more or less fitting. Work pants but not her own, with a shirt and sweater above.

“I was a certified nurse. The bandage you made is good but we’ll have to get that arrow out later today. Now rest, I’ll check on you every so often,” the woman said and stood up.

Kate got a good look at the room for the first time, the walls made of large stone rectangles layered on top of each other. The wooden floor boards creaked with each of Melusine’s steps, the woman leaving through a thick wooden door lined with steel. There were a few glass cases, medieval weapons and armor resting inside. Mattresses and bedrolls were spread out on the ground, a few plates and cups sitting between them on the boards. The simple light bulb hanging from the ceiling was off.

She laid back, closing her eyes with a deep sigh. *You survived the night.*

Kate didn’t feel like checking her injuries. She trusted the woman, based on her experience with people, especially ambulance drivers and other emergency workers. The woman gave off the same calm. *Never met her before, I’m pretty sure*, she thought. Falstadt wasn’t tiny but it was by no means a metropolis, or even a city based on some definitions.

By now she noticed the weird dot in the corner of her vision, there even with her eyes closed. It got larger when she focused on it and expanded into writing when she willed it.

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Goblin Scout]’

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Goblin Scout]’

‘ding’ ‘You have defeated [Orc Raider]’

More of those rpg messages, she thought. *Might as well look them through.*

She knew she shouldn’t be moving with the injuries she had sustained. Perhaps not at all, forever, but Kate was glad to be alive either way. *Being alive is dope.*

‘ding’ ‘Requirements met for Class acquisition: Berserker’

Unyielding rage. You have slain five or more creatures with utmost brutality, wielding a two handed blunt weapon while not wearing armor or wielding a Class. You have fought through pain and injury to slay your enemies. You have killed a formidable adversary while being at five percent of your total health, intent to slay your remaining foes after your unlikely victory.

The Berserker wields their fury in continuous battle, pain and injury but fuel for their unstoppable frenzy. They refuse to wear anything but light, non metal armor, carrying heavy two handed weaponry to strike fear and terror into the hearts of their enemies. Savage, hungry for

blood and death, they fight on as if entranced until nothing remains. Go forth, Berserker, slay all that stands in your way.

Unique stat: Perseverance

Would you like to acquire the Class: Berserker?

'ding' 'Attempting to force acquisition of Class Berserker in subconscious effort to preserve life - Will to live required – Will to live: present'

'ding' 'New Class: Berserker'

Stat points: +2

Unique stat acquired: Perseverance +1

Skill slot acquired [Berserker]: Active +5

Skill slot acquired [Berserker]: Passive +5

Support Class slot acquired: +1

Support Class requirements: Berserker lvl 10

Skills gained in Berserker:

Active: Mindless Ferocity – lvl 1

Tune out all but the sound of battle. Sacrifice what is not required to increase your resistance against pain, shock, and trauma from both injuries and enemy attacks by 5.5%. Auto activates when at 10% health (set value).

Active: Furious Dance – lvl 1

Give in to your coldest fury and become one with the blood and pain of battle. You strike harder, increasing your damage with melee weapons by 5.5%, using 5.5% more stamina for each attack. Your senses are focused on battle alone, making you into the very embodiment of bloodlust until all of your enemies are slain. Each creature you kill while Furious Dance is active returns 2.75% of your damage dealt as stamina.

Active: Reckless Charge – lvl 1

You rush forward with a sudden burst of speed. Choose a distance between 1 and 3.25 meters, each use requiring 20% of your total stamina. None shall flee the field of battle.

Passive: Toll for the Living – lvl 1

Your anger knows no bounds. When you slay an enemy, you absorb 2.75% of their total health. Find and kill them, all.

Passive: Courage of the Unarmored – lvl 1

Your body is a tool for war, forged in battle. While you are not wearing armor made of metal or

above 25% of your body weight, your skin, muscles, and bones are 5.5% more resilient to both physical and magical damage.

Passive: Two Handed Weapon Fighting – lvl 1

You have chosen to forego both shields and subtlety. While wielding a weapon with both hands, you deal 5.5% more damage.

Didn't get a choice with that one eh? Well it did save my life. No wonder the blood loss didn't do me in, she thought, smiling to herself. It felt weird. To know that magic was a thing now, at least in some capacity. Kate didn't question these weird messages for a second, she knew all of it was true. How any of those percentages were calculated was beyond her, but if all that somehow helped her stay alive for a few more days, weeks, or months, she'd be happy to have it.

What a fucking day, she thought and closed her eyes.

Kate Lindgren

Unspent stat points: 2

Class: Berserker – lvl 1

- **Active: Mindless Ferocity – lvl 1**
- **Active: Furious Dance – lvl 1**
- **Active: Reckless Charge – lvl 1**
- **Active:**
- **Active:**
- **Passive: Toll for the Living – lvl 1**
- **Passive: Courage of the Unarmored – lvl 1**
- **Passive: Two Handed Weapon Fighting – lvl 1**
- **Passive:**
- **Passive:**

Support class: Locked

Status:

Vitality: 10

Endurance: 12

Perseverance: 1

Strength: 9

Dexterity: 8

Intelligence: 7

Wisdom: 10

Equipment:

Torso: -

Legs: -

Trinket: -

Food: -